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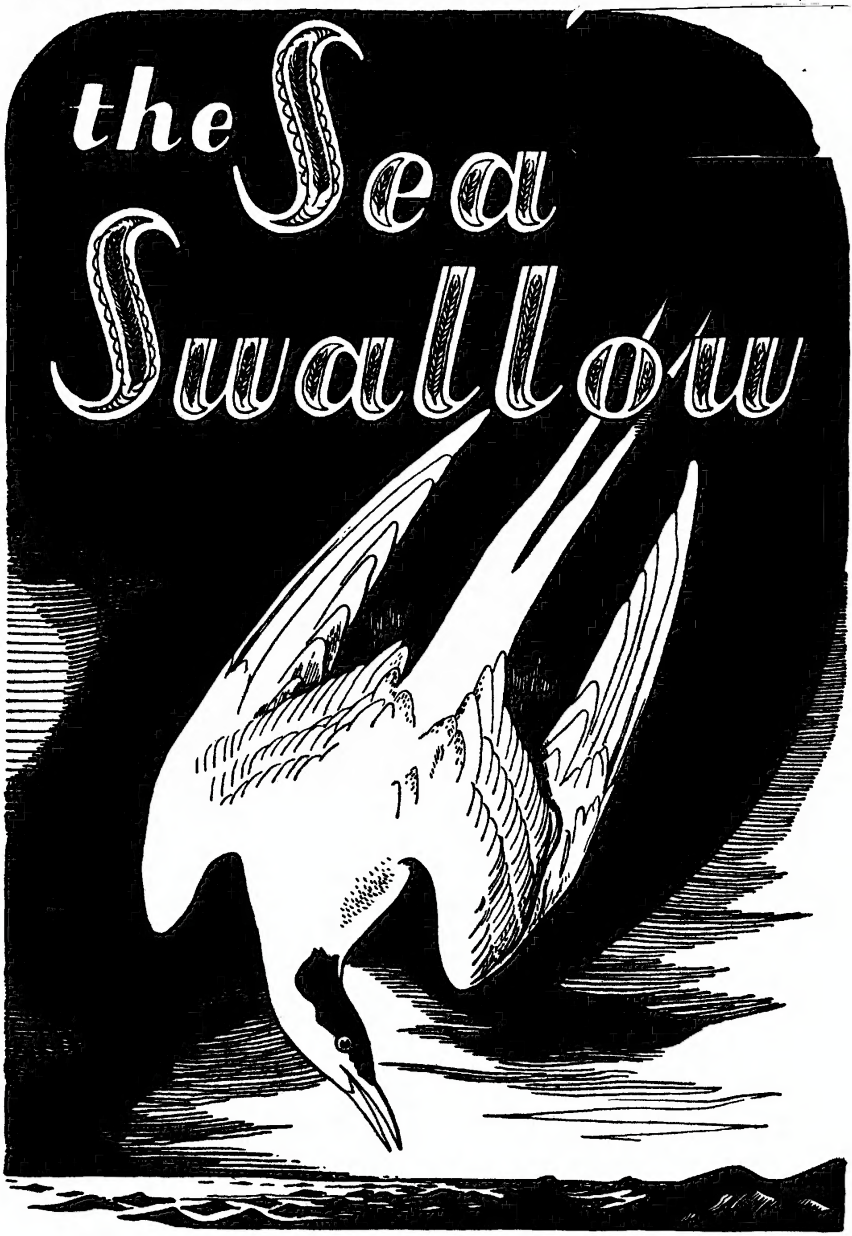
the Sea Swallow



BEING THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

Published December, 1953.

THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRD-WATCHING SOCIETY

(Affiliated to the British Trust for Ornithology)

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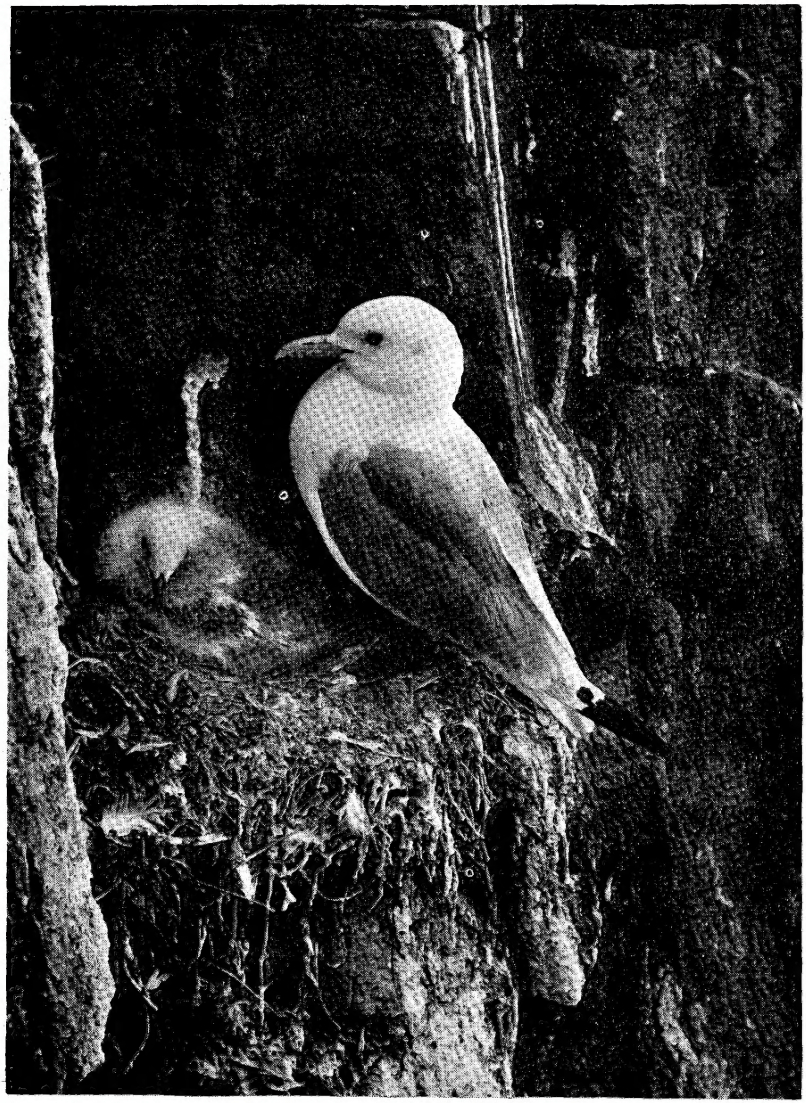


KITTIWAKE AT NEST.

Photograph by Lieut. A. Gilpen, R.N.V.R.

FOREWORD

I am glad to learn that the membership has increased albeit by a small number and that we are financially sound.

The R.N.B.W.S. is definitely establishing itself in the ornithological world and is increasing its activities.

This year we have built up an interesting liaison with the Marine Office of the Air Ministry Meteorological Office. This should add greatly to the knowledge of birds over the ocean as we will get reports from merchant and "weather" ships. The more information we can put into the Society the more we will be able to get out.

In this respect I would like to thank and congratulate our indefatigable Chairman, Captain Tuck, for the immense amount of time and effort he has put in collecting, collating, analysing and publishing the large amount of reports that have come in.

I am sure that the R.N.B.W.S. will continue to make an increasing contribution to Ornithology and I hope you will all help in this.

With all best wishes for 1954.

Lachlan Mackintosh of Mackintosh

Moy Hall,
Moy,
Inverness-shire.

EDITORIAL

STATE OF SOCIETY.

Membership shows a modest increase in numbers and the financial position is substantially the same as this time last year. There should be a small balance in hand after covering the cost of publishing the Annual Report.

Lt.-Commander (S) D. Thomas-Ferrand was compelled most unwillingly to relinquish the position of Hon. Secretary and Treasurer in June. He is studying Russian abroad. We are most grateful for the work and time he gave to the Society's business while in office.

SOME ASPECTS OF 1952-53.

The special events both preceding and following the Coronation which have claimed the time of many of our members on the Home Station have resulted in less information on bird life in the British Isles reaching the Hon. Secretary and Editor. We welcome news and queries from Home, and hope that members will not forget this.

On the other hand the world wide nature of the Society, and the unique opportunities that members abroad can enjoy in studying new species, is a feature of reports reaching the Society in 1952-53. Some of the articles in this report illustrate the point ; we wish to thank those members who have forwarded reports from abroad.

During 1953 a liaison has been built up between R.N.B.W.S. and the Marine Department of the Meteorological Office. The hundreds of merchant ships which forward met. reports to that office frequently include observations on birds. R.N.B.W.S. is now assisting to identify sea birds and remark on ornithological matters raised by the Masters of these ships. The migration of White Storks, quoted in this report, is a case in point. This mutual exchange of information, which includes reports from " Weather Ships " is of interest to both sides, and we welcome the liaison.

A start has now been made in the production of Sea Passage Bird Lists from the analysis of sea reports, and work on certain Foreign area bird lists is in hand. The financial position has not permitted speculative printing of general material in our records with no certainty of demand. If any member wishes for information on certain areas it is possible that we may be able to help, and the Editor will always be glad to send any notes from the R.N.B.W.S. records, which may be applicable, to individual members on loan.

21st BIRTHDAY OF BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY.

We have awaited the opportunity afforded by this report to offer our hearty congratulations to the B.T.O. on its " coming of age." By the tenacity of purpose and enthusiasm of those directing its work the Trust has justly established itself firmly as an essential body in British Ornithology. It has done much to focus attention on the many different aspects of the study of ornithology afforded by practical field work. We thank the Trust for the support given to the R.N.B.W.S. and wish it continued success.

SHIPS' LIBRARIES.

W. B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean* which in the past has been included only in Class B Ships' libraries, i.e. Cruisers and above, has now been added to Class A libraries, i.e. includes small ships. About 240 libraries should now be supplied with this book in contrast to the original 170. Members in small ships please note.

SEA REPORT SHEETS, 1953

As reported in Bulletin No. 25 R.N.B.W.S. Sea Passage Bird Lists are now available for four sea routes:—U.K. to Gibraltar, Gibraltar to Port Said, Port Said to Aden, and Aden to Persian Gulf. A new list, Aden to New Zealand is being prepared.

It will be appreciated that the reports received from H.M. Ships usually appear as scattered bird plots in many different localities, and many reports are needed before a passage list can be built up.

Please help by sending in Sea Report Sheets.

The following reports are acknowledged with thanks. (Reports on single observations are not included.)

HOME WATERS.	
Officers and Men of H.M.S. Vanguard (Sub-Lt. M. Casement, R.N.).	Home and Arctic Waters, 1952.
FAR EAST.	
Able Seaman R. Gibbs	Singapore Area.
OCEAN PASSAGES.	
Lt.-Cdr. (S) G. S. Willis	Suez to Wellington, N.Z., via C. Leenwin and return to East Indies.
Cdr. C. E. Hamond, R.N.	U.K. to Ceylon and return.
Commissioned Engineer N. C. Wain, R.N.	U.K. to Ceylon.

NOTES ON REPORTS.

H.M.S. VANGUARD (M.B.C.).—On 24th and 25th November, 1952, off the north and east coasts of Iceland, many Fulmar Petrels were present, together with several Scandinavian Lesser Black-Backed Gulls. Iceland and Glaucous gulls were quite numerous, the former following the ship in large numbers. A few Herring Gulls were seen.

(C.E.H.)—U.K. to Ceylon and return. Passage of Indian Ocean. On the outward passage from Mombasa to Ceylon the only birds seen on a passage of some 2,800 miles were two unidentified Shear-

waters, one Red Footed Booby, and a group of Frigate Birds east of the Maldive Islands. The Booby remained perched on the bows of the ship for nearly 24 hours, making periodical sorties after flying fish with some success.

On the return passage from Ceylon to Aden the only birds seen were a few Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) until approaching the Gulf of Aden.

(NOTE BY EDITOR.—More sea reports of Indian Ocean passages are particularly desired.)

(G.S.W.)—Suez to Wellington, N.Z., via C. Leeuwin and return to East Indies. A very comprehensive report covering many species. From Suez to Wellington the report includes 109 positive identifications out of 160 reports. From Wellington to Palambang, Sumatra, 61 sightings were positively identified out of 109 observations. In particular this report gives an excellent indication of the variety of Albatrosses, Petrels, and Shearwaters likely to be seen daily in the Southern Oceans.

NOTES FROM HOME

H.M.S. VANGUARD'S REPORT.

This report was received too late to include in the 1952 report, and some extracts of interest are given below.

PORTLAND AREA—PERIOD MAY AND JUNE.

On Portland Bill many pairs of Herring Gulls, Puffins and Guillemots were definitely nesting, whilst Cormorants were also nesting on the ledges of rock just above the water. All these nests are quite inaccessible for close inspection. Several pairs of Fulmar Petrels were present and appeared to be nesting. Corn Buntings are numerous on the Bill, and Skylarks and Meadow Pipits abound.

On the Chesil Beach the following birds were seen nesting : Common Terns on the sparse grass, Little Terns on the shingle, and Stonechats. Other birds seen were Turnstone, Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher, and Ringed Plover. Two Grey Plover and three Sanderlings, all in Summer plumage, were also identified on 17th May.

MALE GREAT GREY SHRIKE (*Lanius excubitor*).—(M.B.C.) writes of this interesting record : " It was about the size of a small Song Thrush. The first time I saw it at a distance I noticed white patches on its wings as it flew, and a black splash on the cheek. Later I saw the bird clearly on the ground ; the upper parts were ashy grey, and the thick black patch through the eye was very prominent. The wings were black with one white patch on each ; the underparts white, faintly tinged with " Bullfinch pink "."

H.M.S. VANGUARD'S SUMMER AND AUTUMN CRUISE.

At the end of June a visit was made to Rotterdam. A list of 65 birds seen in the surrounding country, and at the bird sanctuary on the island of Beer, opposite the Hook, is available for any members requiring such a local list.

THE HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*).

It is always good news to receive reliable reports of the occurrence of this beautiful little falcon. This year it has been seen in Kent in the Sevenoaks area by (J.G.H.), in Kent also on the Pilgrims' Way just to the east of Thurnham by (E.H.J.) on 2nd May, and in Sussex by (G.S.T.) on August 12th.

KENT (J.G.H.) reports having seen a number of interesting birds in the Sevenoaks area during the Summer. These included a Bee-Eater on 18th May, a Hoopoe, a Hobby, and a number of Crossbills.

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATE BIRD (*Fregata m. nothschildi*) ON ISLAND OF TIREE.

On 10th July, 1953, one of these birds of the tropical seas was found alive by Mr. John Graham, Gamekeeper, on Tiree, off the Argyllshire Coast. The bird, which did not survive, is now in the Royal Scottish Museum.

NOTES FROM ABROAD

Several excellent papers have been received from members, some of which are published in this report.

BRITISH NORTH GREENLAND EXPEDITION.

We had hardly expected to have received a report from the expedition at this stage ; the following extract from Commander Simpson's report of 23rd November, 1952, is interesting. He writes : " It was a pleasant surprise on October 1st to find that we were not entirely alone in these inhospitable wastes. The nearest land from the icecap station to the west is the shore of Melville Bay or Inglefield Gulf, 350 miles away ; to the east of Queen Louise Land lies 200 miles off. Judge our surprise whilst we were out on a dropping run to see five ptarmigan alight just in front of my sledge team. They walked around as if searching for food before taking wing again, ten minutes later. The birds were in full Winter plumage. Where did they come from and where were they going ?

We also had a visit from a cock snow bunting which hung around the station for about a week before disappearing. We were glad to see these signs of wild life in the middle of the great snow desert.

ANTARTIC.

Captain E. D. Stroud, R.N., whose article appears in this report, has taken some very good photographs of bird life at Deception Island, South Shetlands.

THE TASMAN SEA.

G. S. Willis, in a report which gives evidence that the Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) definitely follows ships at sea, gives a vivid description of bird and marine life in the Tasman sea shortly before a storm. He writes : "We were in 39 degrees south and heading for the south of Tasmania, though forced later to run for the Bass Strait by the weather. The evening light was the yellow of smoked glass, the sea glassy, a heavy swell rolling in from the south west and everything pointing to the storm which broke upon us the following day. Suddenly a great school of whales, probably Rorquals, preceded by a large school of Bottlenosed Porpoises, drove in a great flurry of foam straight down upon us. Over them hovered a great flock of petrels.

Here was the usual Wandering Albatross, other Mollymawks and two lovely Giant Petrels in the white phase. It all made a magnificent picture, very difficult to describe with justice.

On another occasion in the Tasman Sea too, I retain a vivid picture of three Giant Petrels doing wonderful aerobatics around our bows."

KOREAN WATERS.

Of the many places in the world where no regular observation of bird life from month to month has taken place the coastal waters off the west coast of Korea must certainly be one.

We are therefore all the more indebted to Commander (S) C. E. Smith and Sub-Lieut. Powys Maurice for their detailed observations over the best part of a year. There is not room in this report to publish the combined results of their work, but a composite paper is being prepared and will be available shortly to any members on application. An article by Commander Smith appears in this report. We wish to thank Sub-Lieut. Powys Maurice especially for the many details he has supplied.

MEDITERRANEAN AND SUEZ CANAL.

Little Gulls (*Larus minutus*).

Commander C. E. Hamond in a sea report of a passage from U.K. to Ceylon (passing within sight of the Algerian coast) in early January, 1953, writes : " Over a wide area between Oran and Algiers, Little Gulls were numerous, usually occurring in small groups. They fly low over the water seeking some surface food which they occasionally pick up. Action and flight is not quite like any other gull. They appear very small ; the plain white ends to their rather blunt wings, and the dark underside to their wings are very obvious."

Flamingoes (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), White Pelicans, Herons, and other Fowl of Lake Menzaleh.

C.E.H.'s report gives a reminder that anyone passing through the Suez Canal in the Winter months should not fail to scan the vast shallow lagoons to the east of the canal shortly after leaving Port Said. These lagoons, forming the eastern limit of lake Menzaleh (now split by the canal itself), stretch southwards for 20 miles or so, and are the haunt of thousands of Flamingoes, White Pelicans, the Great White Heron (*Ardea alba*), Grey Herons, and Spoonbills, to mention a few. Of the ducks, Shovellor, Wigeon, Pintail and Teal all abound.

NORTHERN MIGRATION OF WHITE STORKS (*Ciconia ciconia*).

This northward migration was referred to in notes on Gibraltar in the 1952 report. The storks usually pass over Gibraltar during the first 10 days of February. This year it seems that White Storks were flying northwards at the longitude of Crete on March 12th.

The Master of S.S. Matheren (Brocklebank line) reports on this date when 100 miles south of Crete that at 11.30 a.m. a black line was seen stretching from horizon to horizon. The flight of the

birds was slow and ponderous, and their bodies seemed small in camparison with their wing span. They had long necks and very long trailing legs, and were very awkward in their movements as we disturbed them, for they were only flying at 100 to 150 feet above the sea. Their undersides were creamy white, and the feathers on their backs appeared dark slate grey. The birds passed the ship at an estimated rate of 200 per minute, and the main flight was in sight for 45 minutes. Further flights of what were assumed to be the same species were seen later in the day. All flights were heading N.N.W., the wind being E. by S., force 3 at the time.

(NOTE BY EDITOR.—The storks usually migrate at a much greater height, but the Master's description seems to identify the birds as White Storks. The sight of these large birds altering their flight line awkwardly as the ship passed close by must have been unforgettable.)

NORTHERN MIGRATION OF LESSER BLACK BACKED GULLS IN SUEZ CANAL AREA.

In a sea report sheet for the return passage from Ceylon to U.K., Commander Hamond observed a marked northern migration of lesser black-backed gulls in the Gulf of Suez and Canal area. This movement was taking place between April 15th to 18th and was first noted in the northern part of the Red Sea in 23 degrees north

(C.E.H.) remarks that on April 15th small parties of these gulls all in adult plumage were flying steadily N.W. This movement was noticed again the following day, and there were many lesser black-backed gulls, all adults, in Suez Bay. On 18th April, quantities of adult birds were continually passing North up the Canal, and Port Said was full of them.

It was interesting that the Yellow legged Gulls which had been in evidence in January as far south as Aden, had not been seen in mid-April until 33½ degrees N. and 24 degrees E. in the Mediterranean.

AS A MATTER OF INTEREST

GREAT TITS IN THE BEEF SCREEN.

(C.E.S.) writes : " On 16th October, 1952, off the west coast of Korea, about thirty Great Tits flew aboard.

Two flew straight into the beef screen and perched on the rim of a cup of tea that the butcher was holding and started to help themselves. One then flew onto the butcher's head and started pulling out his hair ! which it then took to a corner of the beef screen and poked into a little nook. These two were very tame indeed, and stayed with us until the ship returned to Sasebo.

ICELAND GULLS CALL AWAY THE LIFEBOAT.

(M.C.B.) writes of an incident at sea off the north coast of Iceland : " On the morning of the 25th October, 1952, on board H.M. Tug Reward, and again on the evening of the 26th October, on board H.M.S. Vanguard, cries of help were heard whereupon in each case the drill for " Man overboard " was carried out. No one had gone overboard in fact. In the latter case a radar contact turned out to be a large flock of Iceland Gulls, and it was assumed that the noises heard were the cries of the Iceland Gulls."

ROOKS PARTIALITY FOR WALNUTS.

(G.S.T.) writes : " 18th September, 1953. Once again the annual walnut festival of the rooks is taking place. The walnut trees in this downland village, overlooked for the rest of the year, now ring with the cawing of rooks, flocking to gain uncertain foothold while they pluck the green nuts from the slender overhanging branches. Rook after rook flies in, plucks a walnut and flies off jubilantly, its beak agape with a nut. Many walnuts are dropped by the birds in flight, and I have not yet seen a rook attempting to crack a nut open, though surely this must be their object. In a few days, if the pattern of last year's festival is copied, the assault will have ended, and peace will reign once more in the walnut trees.

(NOTE BY EDITOR.—This habit has been confirmed by another member, who says that in his case the rooks take the nuts over to the sea wall and drop them on the stones. They waste no time in pecking holes in the nuts. He stops the nonsense by hoisting a dead rook to the top of his walnut tree !)

EARLY NOVEMBER—RINGED PENGUINS RETURN TO THE ROOKERY.

Photograph by Captain E. D. Stroud, R.M.

SOME NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF DECEPTION ISLAND, SOUTH SHETLANDS

By Captain E. D. Stroud, D.S.C., Royal Marines.

My stay at Deception Island was from 12th December, 1951, to 30th November, 1952. By the time I had settled in and was able to look around the season was well advanced, and it was only getting started when I left—so short is the best season for the birds !

Before leaving Port Stanley, Falkland Islands, Dr. J. E. Hamilton kindly gave me a list of the birds known to breed on Deception Island. These were all identified and appear in the text, but in addition we saw the Giant Petrel, Adelie Penguin, and Snow Petrel. We hoped we might see an Emperor Penguin as one had come ashore the previous year, but our luck was out.

THE PENGUINS.

Ringed Penguin (*Pygoscelis antarctica*).—This is a regular breeder. There were two rookeries reasonably accessible from the British Base, one a small rookery across the bay ; the other an enormous rookery about two miles as the crow flies on the east coast, across the main ridge of the island and a glacier. It was a magnificent walk on a fine day but could not be done alone.

In 1952 the Ringed Penguins returned at the end of October. On 24th October, no birds had arrived, but on 27th October many birds were present. We visited the main rookery on 31st October ; hundreds of penguins were there, just standing around as snow covered all the ground. There was much sinuous neck work, hissing and some crowing, but no eggs.

On 10th November, thousands of birds were present but only part of the rookery was clear of snow. In this area we counted 21 eggs, all singly. One albino penguin was seen. Our last visit in 1952, was on 19th November, when there were thousands of nests with eggs, the majority with two.

Many birds whose nesting sites were still covered with snow stood around disconsolately, but others, tired of waiting, had laid in snowy serapes, often with icy water running through them.

During the end of the previous 1951-52 season we had visited the main rookery on 18th February and 13th March, 1952. By 18th February the majority of the young birds were looking very smart in their new plumage though patches of down still adhered in places. A few adults were in moult. By 13th March the young had left and only the adults in moult were seen, standing around, looking miserable, surrounded by feathers.

We saw the last Ringed Penguin in the harbour on 3rd April. The estimates of the number of birds in the main rookery have varied between 100,000 and 1,000,000.

GENTOO PENGUIN (*Pygoscelis papua*).—These were seen throughout the year, but were far more numerous in winter and early spring. Up to early April only one or two birds were seen on the beach, but by the end of May about 1,000 were seen, and during October there were still over 200 on the beach. Numbers dwindled sharply in November. We never found a rookery, but as we were unable to visit much of the island it is impossible to say whether the birds still nest.

MACARONI PENGUIN (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*).—These breed among the ringed penguins at the main rookery. On our last visit on 19th November, 1952, we counted 25 birds. Their nests, though scattered amongst those of the ringed penguins, were all together in one small area.

ADELIE PENGUIN (*Pygoscelis adeliae*)—We only recorded the Adelie twelve times, and then never saw more than two birds at a time. None were seen between 14th January and 1st October, 1952.

DOMINICAN GULL (*Larus dominicanus*).

We saw these throughout the year. At mid-winter there were at least 20 birds still on the island. On 13th October over 200 were counted. We found the first egg on 10th November, 1952.

BROWN SKUA (*Catheracta skua lounbergi*).

The greatest number seen was 30 in February, 1952. Soon after numbers decreased and except for one bird seen on 20th April, and 5th May, none were seen from the end of March until 13th October. Numbers then increased slowly.

SHEATHBILL (*Chiouis alba*).

Present throughout the year though numbers fluctuated considerably. Sometimes there were only a dozen, at others up to 70 around the base.

I caught nine birds and kept them for a while with a pig we were fattening up, but as they did not flourish I released five and we ate the others. These five were ringed and dipped in a red dye. They were able to wash the dye off rather quickly, and after two days there were no red sheathbills around. They were certainly unpopular with the other birds while red.

We found the best way to catch the birds was to put out some bait on the soft snow and surround it with thread. The birds soon got entwined in the thread and could be picked up easily.

WREATHED TERN (*Sterna vittate*).

A few birds were present most of the year. The first egg was found on 5th November and the nest had two eggs on 6th November. The first young were found on 14th December. The majority of the terns gather into large flocks during late February and early March before leaving.

CAPE PIGEON (*Daption capensis*).

Many thousands breed on the island and are present in great numbers from September onwards. The numbers fell off sharply during May and between July and the end of August only one was seen. I ringed one bird on its nest in early 1952, and I believe it returned in November, as I saw the ring but was unable to catch it.

WILSON'S PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*).

The first bird was seen on 26th November, and the last on 9th April.

BLACK-BELLIED STORM PETREL (*Fregatta tropica*).

We only saw this bird on two occasions, one bird in each case, on 29th and 31st December, 1951.

ANTARTIC BLUE EYED SHAG (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*, subspecies).

About 30 birds were seen throughout the year, and a small colony nested on some inaccessible rocks near the harbour entrance.

GIANT PETREL (*Macronectes giganteus*).

Two or three birds were usually around throughout the year. The most we saw was 23 on 10th April, 1952. The intermediate plumage was normal, though white birds were not uncommon.

SILVER GREY PETREL (*Priocella antarctica*).

This was only seen on three occasions in October.

SNOW PETREL (*Pagadrowa nives*).

Seen regularly during the winter between 30th March and 24th November. Normally only one or two were seen together.

RINGING.

During the period 3 Adelie, 23 Gentro and 72 Ringed Penguins, 18 Cape Pigeons and 5 Sheathbills were ringed.

BIRD WATCHING OFF THE KOREAN COAST

By Commander (S) C. E. Smith, R.N.

(Note by Editor.—The sea area concerned is comparatively restricted lying within 50 miles of the coast, and much more frequently within 10 miles, and roughly between latitudes of 37½ degrees and 39½ degrees north. The area contains numerous islands close off shore. These islands are hilly and as a rule treeless, but with some scrub oak and stunted fir in places.)

" The following is a record of some of the birds seen off the West Coast of Korea and the Yellow Sea from October, 1952, to July, 1953. Very few birds are seen far out at sea.

SEA BIRDS.

As may be expected the most numerous birds are the Gulls. The commonest are the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), Japanese Gull (*Larus crassirostris*), and Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) in that order. Yellow legged Gulls (*Larus cachinnans*) were present until November, when they disappeared and were not seen again until February. In February, too, a few Common Gulls (*Larus canus*) put in an appearance and in early March an occasional Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreas*) and Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glancescens*) appeared.

A point one notices about all the gulls is that none of them has the facility of being able to catch food in the air. Anything thrown to them is invariably allowed to drop into the water and picked up from there. Sometimes " differences " occur between the gulls and the Black-eared Kites which are abundant.

From mid May onwards no gulls or kites have been seen. They have deserted the area completely and moved elsewhere presumably to breed, but it seems strange not to see a gull or kite anywhere.

Auks are to be seen but are difficult to identify as they are rarely seen close to. There appear to be large numbers of Crested Auklets, (*Aethia cristatella*) around the Quelpart islands, and further north, about 38th parallel Ancient Murrelets (*Synthliboramphus antiqnus*) are numerous.

Note.—Powys Maurice also includes Pigeon Guillemots (*Cepphus columba*) in the area in October, increasing until they were very numerous by March.

Cormorants are numerous but are usually too far off to identify the individual species with certainty.

No Terns, Skuas, Petrels, Kittiwakes nor Phalaropes have been seen during the period (see *Birds of the Ocean*, page 353, section 4).

I may have missed them, but I don't think so, and it seems that if they do come into the Yellow Sea, they do not at least frequent the eastern part of it.

NOTE.—Powys Maurice quotes the White-faced Shearwater (*Puffinus lencerrelas*) as the only species of Shearwater seen in the area. They were entirely absent during Dec., Jan, and Feb., re-appearing at the end of March and becoming numerous from April onwards. They were not seen north of 36 degrees North however.

DUCK.

The most common species are the Common and Velvet Scoters. They first appeared in late November. Americans on one island tried to shoot them from a helicopter without success. They did, however, shoot what they said was a Snow Goose. An English officer who saw the bird said it was a Swan, the more probable as Whooper Swans are seen in the area.

The most memorable day of this period was 31st January. We were at Chodo and the sea was covered with great pancakes of ice. As these pancakes drifted by thousands of Velvet Scoters came down with them. Every detail of the birds stood out clearly. This migration went on for about 2½ hours, in bunches of 30 to 50 birds, and I estimated that three of four thousand must have passed south in that time. Among these " velvets " were a few very light birds, some in the flights others leading them. They were undoubtedly scoters as their size, wing beats, etc., were identical with the ordinary coloured birds. They had white or cream heads, under-parts and backs, but their wings were a very light buff colour with the faintest tinge of brown. There were about one of these birds to every 500 of the others.

On the same day a Sea Eagle was seen perched on the ice with several Black-eared kites. The most noticeable thing about the Sea Eagle, which was a fully grown bird, was its heavy laboured flight. It looked clumsy and entirely lacking in the majesty one normally associates with an Eagle.

LAND BIRDS.

The opportunities to land on the islands during the winter months were rare but on Peang-Yong-Do in late October, I saw a large number of Japanese Great Tits and Tree Sparrows, some Carrion Crows, and Daurian Redstart.

NOTE.—Powys Maurice first saw the Great Tits in early October and states that they were obviously on migration since a month later there were none. The southern migration of Swallows, Finches, Wagtails and Pipits is in full swing in October.

The northern migration appears to start about mid April—Commander Smith continues :

" My first records are of a Pallas's Warbler and Yellow-browed Warbler on 26th April. On 5th May, a Narcissus Flycatcher was found dead on board, as was another off Chodo on 8th May. On this day, too, I saw two swallows and another Yellow-browed Warbler.

Further south at Yong-Pyong-Do I spotted an Eastern or Rufous Turtle Dove, several Eastern Grey Wagtails in beautiful plumage, two or three dozen Little Buntings and a Japanese Eastern Kestrel (?).

On 15th May, I managed to get ashore on Tae-Chong-Do for a very entertaining but exhausting few hours. A small Korean aged about twelve called Kien Sung Yong attached himself to me to practice his English and proved very useful, but he was much more adept at scaling the hills than me. With his aid I saw a Red-bellied Rock Thrush—a lovely thing—the ladies would I'm sure describe its plumage as ' Powder blue ', a flock of Chinese Starlings, a Chinese mountain Hedge Sparrow, a North China Alpine Accentor, Carrion Crows, a Korean Magpie, large white rumped Swifts, and some member of the Grosbeak family. Kien had a Thick-billed Shrike in his house which I was offered as a present but declined.

As a reward for his assistance I offered him some nutty, by then rather sticky, some cigarettes and a 10-cent American Scrip dollar note, but he refused all these and said he'd like what sounded like ' many gins.' I felt the same way, too ! but I eventually discovered that what he wanted was some ' magazines ' to practice reading."

SOME FURTHER NOTES FROM THE WEST COAST OF KOREA

A short list of some birds not quoted in Commander Smith's account is given below.

DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS.

Large numbers of wildfowl were seen during November, in particular Geese migrating south. On one day 1,500 geese were counted, mostly Whitefronts with some Eastern Graylags amongst them. The same day about 400 Eastern Swamp Ducks and a few Whooper Swans were seen. Mallard and Teal were also identified.

HERONS.

Eastern Grey Herons were seen at regular intervals.

WAGTAILS.

During the Southern migration (October) both Pied and Yellow (sp) were numerous.

PHALAROPES.

Although not seen in the area of Commander Smith's records, Phalaropes were observed in flocks in latitude 32½ deg. North, longitude 124 deg. East in August. About 500 were seen in one afternoon all moving South.

NESTING RECORDS.

Between May and August, Japanese Gulls and White Rumped Swifts were breeding on the island of Sei Do, latitude 38½ deg. North.

BOOKS OF REFERENCE.

Birds of the Ocean—W. B. Alexander.
Birds of Hong Kong—G. A. C. Herklots.
Monograph of the Birds of Japan—Dr. Uchida.

FIVE WEEKS IN CEYLON

By Commander C. E. Hamond, D.S.O., D.S.C.* R.N. (rtd.)

These notes are intended as a rough guide to visitors to Trincomalee on where to go and what birds to look for. They are based on observations in the following areas during which 110 species were identified :

(1) Easy walks in Clappenburg area from our base at the Ceylon Sea Anglers' Club.
(2) Visits to several " Tanks " through the kindness of residents who took us there.
(3) Saltpans and Mudflats.
(4) Rice land.
(5) Peradenia Gardens near Kandy.

BOOKS OF REFERENCE.

The Manual of Ceylon Birds—W. E. Wait. V.G. text, scantily illustrated.

Birds of Ceylon—Parts 1 and 2—W. W. A. Phillips. Small paper books each describing 20 familiar species. Illustrations by C.L.

Bird Life in Ceylon—Mrs. Cicely Lushington. A more modern publication. Simple and easy for " snap " recognition.

CONTACT.

Commissioned Engineer N. C. Wain, R.N., No. 1 Staff Quarters, Boom Defence Depot, China Bay, Tel. RNAS 18 (home), will welcome all members as he welcomed us with his accurate and helpful knowledge.

AREA (1).

From the Sea Anglers Club short walks to Snug Cove or Deadman's Cave will give you (starting from scratch) a new bird every few yards. Outstanding are the Roller, Red-backed Woodpecker, Black-headed Oriole, Bee Eater (3 species), Kingfishers (2 sp.), Barbets (2 or 3), including the Coppersmith which has a red and yellow face and says " Ponk " once per second for four hours on end. Look out for the Paradise Flycatcher, Parrakeets (2 sp.), and the gorgeous Jungle Cock plentiful on Sober Island.

White bellied Sea Eagle

Cuckoos are " teasers," very similar species giving only short glimpses in thick covert. They include the great " Crow Pheasant," black with chestnut wings, and a maddening creature called the Koel which works itself into a frenzy of discord.

There are several Eagles, the top one being the White Bellied Sea Eagle. His plane down at 45 degrees from 500 feet is a grand sight, and ends with a splash from which he emerges with a large fish. To descend to the ridiculous look out for Sunbirds (2 sp.), 3 inches long.

AREA (2).

The Tanks all repay a visit. They vary greatly in depth and vegetation, and therefore in bird life.

Audau Kulam and Periya Kulam are the handiest, but if you get a chance, go to " Headwaters " the Admiralty reservoir. Here a track allows very close observation of the birds and you may have the luck to see a wild elephant !

Ducks are in large numbers but we only saw Cotton Teal, Whistling Teal and Garganay.

Herons range from a giant, seen at Horowpatama, through a series of species, coloured and white, down to a little green chap no bigger than a jackdaw. On most tanks are masses of Cormorants of 2 if not 3 species which hunt in packs.

The Indian Darter is given to soaring at a great height towards evening, and to swimming with the hull completely submerged.

You should also see Pelicans, open billed Storks, Ibis and the Stork Billed Kingfisher (as big as a crow with a vast red bill). Most amazing of all is the Jacana, a strange creature whose toes are as long as its legs, tastefully coloured in chocolate, yellow and white, with a tail like a cock pheasant and a voice like a tom cat.

AREA (3).

The Saltpans near Nilaveli will give you a good range of waders from Stilts to Sanderlings. Particularly numerous is the Marsh Sandpiper. The Wood Sandpiper swarms in all the paddy fields and marshes, and the Common Sandpiper abounds round the shore. Two Sand Plovers, large and small, the Little Ringed Plover and Eastern Golder and a Wattled Plover, called " did you do it," name only a few of the waders.

A good place is the southern end of the Air Field at China Bay where it meets Lake Tampalagam. Here many waders flight in on the flood tide and many hundreds of grey-headed wagtails congregate at dusk.

If you are tired of the easy birds you can have a go at the 4 or 5 species of larks, which live there.

AREA (4).

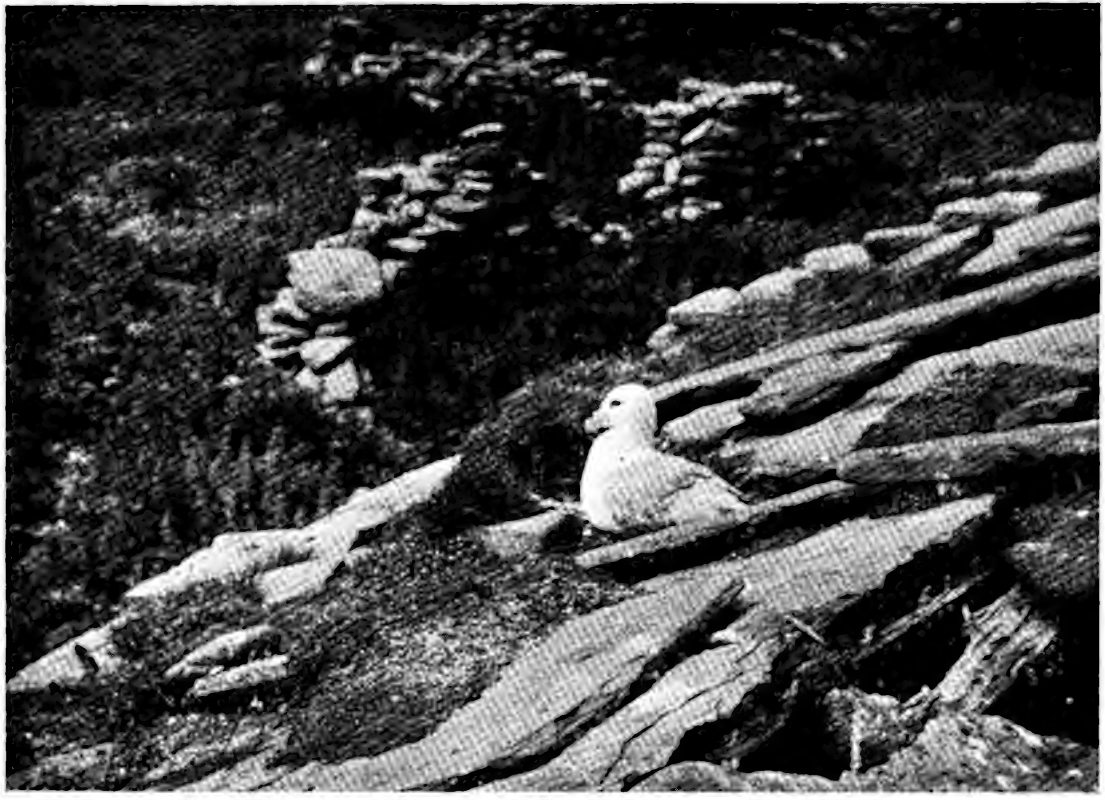
In the Paddy fields Snipe, Wood Sandpiper and a small heron locally called Paddy Bird all abound. Raptores are difficult but the Snake Eagle is a feature here and in the jungle, with closed primaries like an owl and narrow parallel lines all over the underside of the wings. I spotted an old friend in the Marsh Harrier, also a Pied Kingfisher and green pigeon (2 sp.). At dusk the air is full of flighting birds ; Cotton Teal, Whistling Teal, Herons, Egrets, Pelicans and large flocks of rose ringed parakeets.

The human element in these parts is at times diverting, and a picture sticks in my mind of a gentleman in spotless white, protected from the sun by a large umbrella, driving six buffaloes along a track.

At Peradeniya we witnessed the amazing sight of two elderly and bloated beagles in full cry after a hare.

Take it bye and large we found the varied bird life in Ceylon a joy, only exceeded by the great kindness shown to us on all sides.

☼ ☼



FULMAR NESTING ON ROOF OF OLD BOTHY.

Photograph by Lieut. F. A. G. Duffey, R.N.V.R.

OBSERVATIONS ON A FULMAR COLONY

In spite of the fact that the Fulmar is one of our most familiar oceanic birds in the North Atlantic and so much interest has been aroused by its remarkable range expansion in this country, there are certain fundamental aspects of its breeding biology about which we had practically no information until recent years. Probably few other common species have presented us with so many puzzling problems and a consequent temptation to theorise when the facts were not available.

James Fisher's monumental work on the species gave us a wealth of detail on its distribution and numbers and other aspects of population problems but accounts of the life-history of the individual bird are still more speculation than fact. Many of us have watched a Fulmar incubating its egg on a cliff ledge but strangely enough it was not known until recently whether the same bird was likely to breed again the next year or had bred the previous year, whether or not it mated for life or whether it came back to the same place year after year. It still is not known how old the Fulmar is before it breeds, how far it goes for food before and after the egg had hatched, and very little is known of the food fed to nestlings.

One could go on enumerating many more such problems but thanks to an experiment started in 1950, some of the answers are gradually being brought to light. In that year two biologists from Aberdeen University, Drs. Robert Carrick and George Dunnet, happened to visit a small uninhabited island in the Orkneys and were surprised to find that most of the Fulmars breeding there had chosen very accessible nest-sites along the low cliffs and rocky shore and even nested inland at the entrance of rabbit holes. They soon realised that here was a unique opportunity to study a small isolated colony by colour-ringing adults and young and recording their return in subsequent years. At the time it was thought by a few biologists including myself that the Fulmar did not breed every year but had periodic non-breeding years when it remained at sea. This was prompted by observations at the breeding colonies and the recording of large numbers of Fulmars at sea each summer. Carrick and Dunnet immediately thought that this problem could be settled once the nesting birds had been ringed so that any individual bird could be identified with its nest-site and previous breeding record.

They decided to put two colour-rings on each leg with the usual metal ring which might be put on either left or right leg. Using 8 or 9 different colours together with the metal ring made available a very large number of combinations. The chicks in 1950 were given a metal ring only but in subsequent years a single colour-ring was also put on each leg.

The results of this experiment for the four seasons 1950-1953 are soon to be published so the details cannot be described here but it can be said that not only were individual birds found to return in successive years but they usually had the same mate and nested on exactly the same site. There seemed no doubt that annual breeding in the Fulmar was established.

At the end of 1952 Carrick and Dunnet were unable to continue the experiment and I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity of carrying it on. Here I must record my indebtedness to Sandy Anderson, of Aberdeen, who accompanied me to the island in 1953 and without whose help the work would not have been possible.

In 1953, we found that we had the time and resources for two trips to the island (made possible by the Nature Conservancy and Aberdeen University), so we decided to spend a few days there in May, when the eggs were being laid and a few more days in August to ring the chicks before they departed to sea. None of Carrick and Dunnet's trips had been made before July so no estimate had yet been made of the total number of eggs laid.

The island is a dome, rising to about 100 ft. and pear-shaped in outline. It is a little over $\frac{1}{2}$-mile in diameter and covered with turf, heather and other moorland vegetation. There are no trees or shrubs or in fact any tall herbaceous vegetation except in the sheltered low-lying parts where in August we found a forest of tall thistles. Most of the coastline is low and rocky or pebbly but in the north-west and north there are cliffs to about 40 feet. The Fulmars nest all round the coast but are most numerous in places where there are abundant ledges even if such places are readily accessible.

In May we found them nesting in a most extraordinary variety of places. A ruined Bothy had nests on its roof and even one bird was on an egg in a corner of the kitchen. There is a walled enclosure around the entrance side of the Bothy which means that the owner of this egg had to walk from the kitchen to the door then 10-12 yards to the enclosure gate-way before it could take flight. Other eggs were found at the base of old walls, in an old door-way of another enclosure, at the entrance to a rabbit hole on the moor,

inside and outside a ruined monastery and on ledges in a small valley which crosses the island from north to south.

Fulmars are, of course, not the only birds nesting on this island. On the summit there is a thriving colony of Great Black-backed Gulls and around the cost nesting in a variety of very accessible places are Common Gulls, Arctic Terns, Herring Gulls, Shags, Ringed Plovers, Oyster-catchers, Puffins, Black Guillemots and Rock Doves. We found the nest of a Hooded Crow and inland the nest of the Arctic Skua. One of the most frequent nests found away from the coast was that of the Eider Duck and along the old ruined walls Wheatears were nesting. There were 2 or 3 pairs of Blackbirds breeding but no Song Thrushes. The Starling was common but no House Sparrows have been seen. Fortunately for most of these birds, including the Fulmar, there are no rats, mice, stoats, weasels or foxes on the island.

Our plan in May was observation only. If we had tried to catch the adult Fulmars on their newly laid eggs there would have been a considerable egg-loss due to the attentions of Greater Black-backed Gulls while the eggs were unprotected. We wanted to record the number of eggs and identity of the colour-ringed birds which had returned, with as little disturbance as possible. In many cases we were able to see if an egg was present and the colour of the rings, without getting closer than about 10 yards to the nest-site but in other cases we had no option but to disturb the parent. On one occasion the incubating bird left the site very quickly, rolling its egg forward a few inches and cracking it. Very regretfully we thought we would have to write it off but on our return in August we were delighted to find it had successfully hatched and produced a chick.

In 1953 the 19 chicks ringed by Carrick and Dunnet in their first year were 3 years old and for the first time it seemed possible that some might return for prospecting if not breeding. The identification mark of these birds was a metal ring on the left leg. On our second day as we were carefully examining incubating Fulmars, we came across one bird sitting with its left tarsus fully uncovered. On it was a single metal ring. We were thrilled, here was the first return of a chick as a breeding bird and we knew exactly when it was born. Normally the ringed Fulmars can be identified on the ring-combination of either leg but as this was a rather special case we thought it would be prudent to examine the right leg as well. I coaxed the bird to half-stand so that the feathers uncovered the all-important leg and we were amazed and somewhat crestfallen to find 2 colour-rings there. It was a bird ringed as an adult but somehow, surely a chance in thousands, it had lost both colour-rings on its left leg.

Evidence from both visits enables us to say that at least 90 eggs had been laid but certainly no more than 32 produced chicks. Also, although 107 adult Fulmars had been ringed up to the end of the 1952 season, we only identified 39 on the island in 1953. There is, of course, a certain mortality of adults by examination of the figures shows that quite a large proportion of the islands' Fulmar population appears to miss a season or two seasons between being seen at the colony whether recorded breeding or not. There are a number of ways how this might come about but on balance the evidence seems to suggest that some Fulmars do not breed or attempt to breed in successive years. Carrick and Dunnet have already shown that some individuals and pairs nest two or 3 years running so the situation at present is a complex one.

Perhaps we are still far from knowing the full facts but until we can find the means to obtain them we must use the indirect and circumstantial evidence that is available to further our knowledge of the Fulmar's breeding cycle. We hope that the Orkney experiment will eventually provide many of the answers we want but at present the Fulmar still remains a delightful subject for argument and theorising.

ERIC DUFFEY.

NOTES RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

We wish to acknowledge notes received from the following members and not recorded elsewhere.

Chief O. A. C. W. Tribe	Notes on birds in Morocco.
Capt. (L) E. H. Johnson	Notes from Kent.
Lt.-Commander T. Emanuel	Notes from Plymouth area.
Able Seaman R. Gibbs	Notes from Malayan waters.
Commissioned Engineer N. C. Wain	Notes from Trincomalee.
Sub-Lt. M. B. Casement	Several useful notes and photographs.
Field Club, R.N.C., Dartmouth	Notes on Activities.

WORLD WIDE BOOK AND CONTACT LIST

(**As in 1952 edition of** *Sea Swallow.*)

SECTION A.—*Add* after serial 3, new serial 4.

4. Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds	R. S. R. Fitter and R. A. Richardson	Collins, London

SECTION B.—*Delete* under No. 1 GIBRALTAR all reference to (1) Col. A. J. S. Tuke, etc.

Under No. 17 NEW ZEALAND rewrite (ii) as : (ii) Dr. R. A. Falla, Dominion Museum, Wellington, N.Z.

ROYAL NAVAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD 1st DECEMBER, 1951—30th NOVEMBER, 1952.

	£ s d	£ s d
BALANCE, 1ST DECEMBER, 1951 :		
Cash at Bank	3 2 2	
Cash in Hand	0 13 0	
		5 15 2
Life Subscriptions	17 14 0	
Annual ,, ...	56 18 0	
		74 12 0
Sale of *Sea Swallow*		24 12 4
Resale of British Trust for Ornithology Publications		0 8 6
Sale of Christmas Cards		1 12 1
Voluntary Contributions		1 0 0
		£106 0 1
		£ s d
Balance 1st December, 1952		37 10 10

	£ s d	£ s d
Postages		7 8 0
PRINTING :		
Annual Report	46 2 0	
Bulletins, etc, ...	6 2 9	
		52 4 9
Subscription to British Trust for Ornithology		2 0 0
British Trust for Ornithology Publications		0 5 0
Bank Charges		1 11 6
Hire of Films		5 0 0
Balance 30th November, 1952—Cash at Bank		37 10 10
		£106 0 1

I have examined the above Account with the books and records of the Society and certify that it is correct and in accordance therewith.

19 Fenchurch Street,
London, E.C.3.,
19*th December*, 1952.

(*Signed*) R. G. PEGLER,
Chartered Accountant and Hon. Auditor.